



# Learning Futures

The Engaging School:  
principles and practices

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# INTRODUCTION

For two years, the Learning Futures programme has been working with over forty schools across England to innovate in pedagogy so that more young people engage with their learning, achieve better learning outcomes, and remain committed to learning beyond their school years.

This is the programme’s third publication. The first<sup>1</sup> identified the problem of student disengagement and the programme’s approach to finding solutions. The second, Engaging Students<sup>2</sup>, identified the four principles of ‘deep engagement’. This pamphlet presents a vision for an ‘engaging school’ defined by four approaches to its realisation: Enquiry-based Learning, School as ‘Base Camp’, Extended Learning Relationships, and School as Learning Commons.

The Learning Futures programme has tackled student disengagement because engagement is a precondition of learning: if students aren’t engaged in school, they won’t learn – or rather, they will learn a set of skills that allow them superficially to satisfy the demands of schooling, and focus instead on whatever it is that *does* interest them. This is true not only for ‘visibly disengaged’ (e.g. disruptive or obviously apathetic) students, but also for ‘disengaged achievers’: students who are adept at achieving high marks, but not at dealing with the more complex challenges that they will face as 21st century workers and citizens.

Concern about the challenges of the new century has led to international calls for ‘21st century skills’ such as collaboration, information literacy, and adaptability<sup>3</sup>, that today’s young people will need in order to work and thrive as the world grows more interconnected, the environment becomes less stable, and technology continues to alter our relationship to information. If schools are to foster such skills, they need to radically change not only *what* but *how* they teach. They can begin to achieve this by shifting the focus of engagement away from students (‘how can we get them to engage with school?’) and to the school itself (‘how are we engaging with parents/carers, the local community, local businesses, and other schools?’).

When a school becomes ‘engaged’, it will engage students, and it will be responsive to the needs of the 21st century. The Learning Futures sites have been trialling methods of achieving this. Through this process of experimentation, the Learning Futures programme has identified the ‘four approaches to engagement’ presented in this pamphlet.

To find out more about the programme, and to download its publications, visit [www.learningfutures.org/news/resources](http://www.learningfutures.org/news/resources)

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# FROM PRINCIPLES TO PRACTICE

## Four approaches to school engagement

Learning Futures has identified four approaches to designing learning for school engagement: **Enquiry-based Learning, School as ‘Base Camp’, Extended Learning Relationships, and School as Learning Commons.**

These four approaches have come directly from the findings of the Learning Futures Schools, and are most powerful when they are employed holistically and coherently. They are underpinned by the four principles of ‘deep engagement’, identified in the previous Learning Futures pamphlet, *Engaging Students*: learning is most engaging when it is **placed, purposeful, pervasive, and principled**.

The Learning Futures principles and approaches chime with research by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which has found that learning is most powerful when it is learner-centred, structured and well designed, profoundly personalised, inclusive, and social<sup>4</sup>.

Schools in the Learning Futures programme have found that the principles and approaches are strongly interrelated and supportive of each other. For example good enquiry-based learning frequently entails moving beyond the classroom to pursue the enquiry in real contexts, and where a school is a genuine learning community (a ‘learning commons’) it is more likely that powerful learning relationships can be established.

This is borne out by the Learning Futures Evaluation<sup>5</sup>, which has found that the four approaches are more powerful in combination than individually. Specifically, the evaluation reports that ‘The greatest impact on

**FOUR APPROACHES TO SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT**

**Enquiry-based learning:** learning by seeking out and evaluating information, often within an extended project

**School as ‘base camp’:** the school as a base where learning is organised (not its only location) taking students into their communities and further afield

**Extended learning relationships:** reciprocal relationships that support learning – these can be peer-peer, student-teacher, involve parents, external mentors, businesses, external experts and others

**School as Learning commons:** the school as ‘common ground’, with all its users sharing access to its resources, and responsibility for its development

**FOUR PRINCIPLES OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT**

**Purposeful:** absorbs the student in actions of practical or intellectual value, fosters a sense of value and agency – students have the chance to work like professionals

**Placed:** reaches (and has relevance to) students in the space that they inhabit, connecting with the student’s family/community and interests outside school

**Pervasive:** extends beyond examinations, is supported by family, carers, and peers, and can be prolonged through independent (and interdependent) informal learning

**Principled:** appeals to the student’s passions or moral purpose – it matters to students

student engagement took place in schools which integrated all of the Learning Futures themes into their pedagogy’, and that ‘There is evidence of a positive relationship between these engagement outcome measures and student learning outcomes, as measured by National Curriculum attainment scores’.

This finding has had a significant impact upon Learning Futures schools, inspiring them to revise structures and curricula to accommodate a more holistic plan for the next stage of the Learning Futures programme.

Moreover, the Learning Futures programme has found that ‘engagement’ is not just something that

students experience. In 21st century conditions, it arises when schools *themselves* are engaged with their communities, with parents/carers, with the wider world, and with their own growth as learning organisations. Like learning itself, engagement is not something which is done *to* students but something done *with* them.

The following four sections offer an in-depth look at each approach to school engagement, with examples from the work taking place at Learning Futures Schools (summarised on pages 38–40) and the voices of teachers and learners involved in the work.

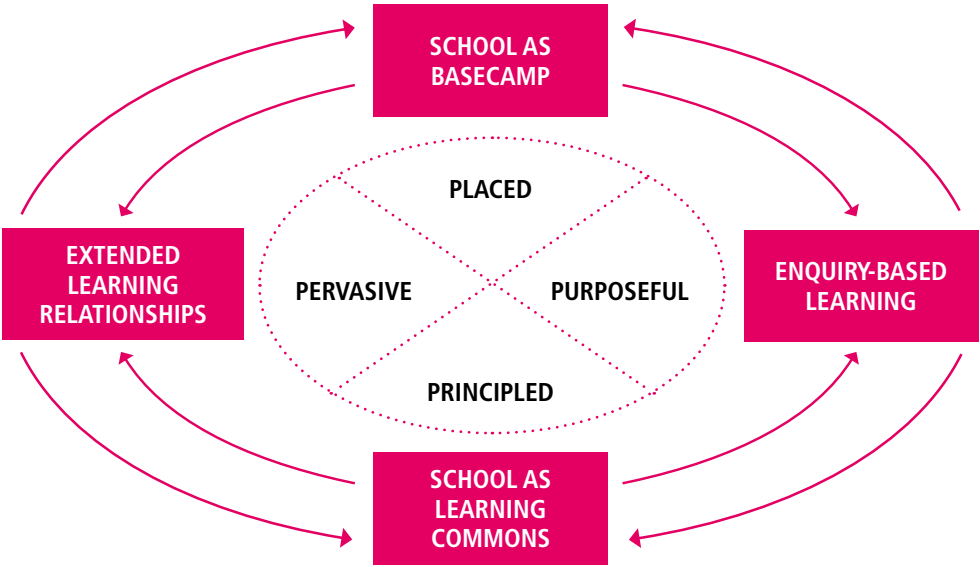


Fig. 1 THE FOUR APPROACHES TO DESIGNING LEARNING FOR SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT



# ENQUIRY-BASED LEARNING

Enquiry-based learning is a key component of the Learning Futures model. Its premise is that how students learn is as important as what they learn, because learning is a skill they can carry with them for their entire lives.

Students become 'expert learners' by learning through enquiry – formulating questions, researching, and experimenting. This is in contrast to 'transmissive learning', where students are expected to memorise information that is presented to them – a method of learning that develops a very narrow skill set (listening, memorising, and repeating).

Enquiry in Learning Futures draws on two pedagogical methods:

**Enquiry-based Learning (EBL):** seeking out and evaluating information in order to answer open-ended questions and solve open-ended problems;

**Project-based Learning (PBL):** carrying out an extended project that produces a tangible output.

It has become clear that these two methods are enhanced by being combined: enquiry is most powerful when it is part of a project with tangible results, while students learn most from projects that are propelled by open (but scaffolded) enquiry.

## RESEARCH SUPPORTING ENQUIRY-BASED LEARNING

There is a wealth of evidence that students learn better when they can pursue their own lines of enquiry and work on open-ended projects. Prof. John Hattie's meta-analysis of 205 studies of enquiry-based learning<sup>6</sup> found that it 'was shown to produce transferable critical thinking skills as well as significant domain benefits, improved achievement, and improved attitude towards the subject.'

Furthermore, contrary to the widely-held assumption that EBL is only useful for 'stretching' the most able students, Hattie found that these effects were particularly powerful 'where students' thinking may not previously have been valued'

There is evidence that well-designed EBL increases attainment: at the University of Michigan, Robert Geier and his colleagues found significantly higher standardised-test pass rates among secondary school students taking enquiry-based science modules at an urban high school than among their peers at eighteen other schools<sup>7</sup>.

Though Geier's findings are impressive, the greatest gains from EBL appear not only in standardised test scores – which tend to focus on decontextualised content knowledge – but in areas such as problem solving, curiosity, creativity, independence, positive feelings about school, and applying knowledge in new contexts.

A study of Maths teaching in English secondary schools found that students doing group projects not only outperformed their peers in their GCSEs, they scored better on 'conceptual questions' that could not be answered by rote learning. But the starkest difference between the two groups was attitude to maths: the majority of those who had been taught 'traditionally' reported that they 'found the work boring and tedious', while those who had taken the project-based modules described maths as 'a dynamic, flexible subject that involved exploration and thought'<sup>8</sup>.

*The mind is not a vessel to be filled,  
but a fire to be lighted!*

PLUTARCH

## EVIDENCE FROM THE LEARNING FUTURES EVALUATION

The interim evaluation of Learning Futures, carried out by the University of Bristol, paints a similar picture.

The evaluation draws upon surveys of students using the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI), reports from student researchers at the schools, video footage from classrooms, and over sixty hours of interviews with students and teachers.

Its findings strongly endorse enquiry-based learning, as long as it is 'carefully scaffolded so that young people can

gradually take more responsibility for how and what they learn'. However, students do not want to abandon transmission-based learning altogether: most students felt that 60% enquiry – 40% transmission struck the right balance.

A particularly important finding of the evaluation was students' 'overwhelming' preference for active, hands-on learning. This is the sort of learning made possible by extended projects, which are becoming the cornerstone of many Learning Futures schools.

### FROM OUR BLOG:

#### FAST CARS AT MATTHEW MOSS

A group of three students wanted to do a project on cars. In this instance, the scrutiny phase, in which their learning plan is challenged to destruction by both me and the rest of the class, was paramount.

I suggested that the learning from taking a high-performance engine apart would be real and significant and they'd actually get to find things out and push themselves.

They were really excited by the reality of it: real engine, real tools, and off we went.

As luck would have it, I had three expired Subaru EJ20TT engines at a friend's garage. Initially I planned to bring a complete unit in for them to strip, but I started to worry about the toxicity of old engine oil and health

and safety. Then I remembered that my friend and I had one stripped and cleaned in bits already. So the challenge evolved to building the engine from bits – just as good and far cleaner and safer.

Whilst the lads were searching on the internet for the engine's 'build-sheet', I was working out how to get all these engine parts to school. Finally got the engine delivered in sections in bin bags to my house and then transferred it all to one of my local authority refuse wheelie bins. The next morning I was in suit and tie dragging the bin through the streets of Castleton to school. The few cars about at that time seemed happy enough to drive around me, albeit staring a bit in the process, presumably wondering 'What's that teacher from Matthew Moss doing stripping someone's wheelie bin?'

I put the bin at the back of school, and by 9.30am the three learners had everything out and spread around. These students have a full morning of My World on a Monday and I visited them a couple of times until break started at 10.50am. A light drizzle was setting in now as I went to tell them to come in for break time, but they politely refused the invitation. What was clear was that they were in the current of a real learning flow, and had built up significant momentum. They had hypotheses in the air about which sections were going to fit where. It was absolutely intense. And how many times does our traditional timetable interrupt flow when it takes off?

With myself and the Head teacher watching them through the hall I left them to it, still seriously and seamlessly engaged.

## ENQUIRY-BASED LEARNING

### BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

In light of all this it is rather surprising that enquiry- and project-based learning continues to remain a minority pursuit in mainstream education. Several possible explanations have been advanced for this<sup>9</sup>:

- Lack of resources;
- Lack of planning time;
- Large class sizes;
- Lack of teacher autonomy.

Additionally, researchers have observed a narrowing of the curriculum in order to meet the demands for University places. Ironically, many universities are now turning much of their focus on applicants' extracurricular activities, because academic attainment within a circumscribed curriculum and assessment structure gives such an impoverished picture of a student's abilities.

### LEARNING FUTURES & ENQUIRY-BASED LEARNING

There are five things that have helped enquiry-based learning to flourish in Learning Futures schools:

- Redefined time and place;
- Differentiated support and scaffolding;
- Public exhibitions of projects;
- Learner autonomy;
- The 'So What' Factor.
- An accountability framework which inhibits non-discipline based approaches

#### Redefined time and space

The currently-popular fifty-minute secondary school lesson is designed for efficient transmission of information from teachers to students. Open-ended enquiries and extended projects demand larger blocks of time. At Cramlington Learning Village science is

### CASE STUDY

#### Developing Independent Learners at Haybridge

Teachers at Haybridge (a school deemed 'outstanding' by Ofsted in all categories) have been reflecting upon the contrast between the prescriptive tendencies of mainstream school pedagogy, and the creative and independent thinking skills demanded by undergraduate study.

They joined Learning Futures in order to tackle this perceived disparity and have introduced innovative changes to timetabling, curriculum, and pedagogy in Key Stage Three, in order to develop enquiry-based learning and enquiry-led projects.

One Haybridge student's blog post testifies to the new challenge they face:

*In Science we had to make a raft. Our teamwork wasn't very good, so we learnt that we had to develop it. Our raft floated, however it fell apart in the water – another lesson learnt!*

taught in half-day blocks, allowing students to carry out extended experiments (webcams in the labs also allow students to keep tabs on their work over the holidays), while humanities classes are divided such that two teachers are given responsibility for 60 students. This adds further flexibility to the timetable and allows teachers to split the groups in any way that suits their needs, and to run cross-disciplinary sessions. Furthermore, it creates a context for collaborative planning and reflection on pedagogy, for which there is usually little space. Diana Odoom, a student learning commissioner at the Harris Federation, had this to say when she visited Cramlington:

*We talked to them about their lesson structure which we found really interesting because their lessons were one*

## We have begun to develop a schematic for the layout of a 'project' classroom – so what does a 'project' classroom look like?

MARK LOVATT, CRAMLINGTON LEARNING VILLAGE

*hour and fifteen minutes long and when we asked them whether they were comfortable with the lesson structure they said 'Yes!' because it gave the students more time to focus on their work.*

Cramlington and other schools are also using learning space in new ways. Cramlington's recently-built 'Junior Learning Village', for its 11-12 year olds, is built around a sheltered 'village street' that hosts art exhibitions and 'village fairs', and can be used for day-to-day learning. The school took a similar approach to its 'Open Learning Science Plaza' and adjacent biodome, divided into different 'zones' designed for discussion, research, and experimentation. This allows students the freedom to carry out their own science projects – and the means to carry them out with rigour and imagination.

Other schools are redefining learning space without new buildings. A teacher at Matthew Moss High School, for example, has remodelled her classroom into three learning zones: a practical area, an area with written materials, and an area with notebooks, laptops and the internet. Students can use this space in order to plot their own path through the project.

Perhaps the most radical reconfiguration of time and space is being carried out at Biddenham International School, where school-based students and home-educated learners have been working together on extended projects both in and out of school.

#### Differentiated support and scaffolding

A particular challenge for a number of schools has been identifying the appropriate levels of support for students carrying out independent research; some students are inexperienced at pursuing open-ended questions

and need more support than other, more independent, learners. Cramlington's Learning Futures coordinator, Mark Lovatt, addresses this issue by grounding enquiry in concrete tasks:

*The freedom to do anything often leaves students faced with a tsunami of choice that causes mental paralysis. Giving them a task that provides an anchor point of certainty, e.g. 'produce a proposal', gives them a base from which they can creatively expand and, most importantly, do so feeling safe that what they are doing is 'right'.*

Differentiation of enquiry and research processes can offer further support:

*Each task can be supported with models or links to examples that will give students at the low end of the ability spectrum an example to imitate, give students in the middle something to develop and adapt to their needs, and provide gifted and talented students with a creative input that they can cherry-pick from and combine with other ideas.*

As Lovatt suggests, a single example can be used to support a range of learners' needs.

Differentiation and scaffolding are the structural conditions on which enquiry-based learning will stand or fall, and in any project there are a set of balances that need to be struck:

- between the freedom to fail and the need to build confident learners;
- between ensuring requisite knowledge is acquired and enabling more freedom of choice for students;
- between innovative pedagogies and conventional transmissive approaches.

There is no formula for striking these balances – each school, and indeed each classroom, will have different needs.

Public exhibitions of projects

In Learning Futures schools, public exhibitions and presentations of student work have opened the school building to parents, carers, and community members with a transformative impact on whole-school engagement.

For students, public exhibition means that they will literally stand by their work, under scrutiny and questioning from family, friends, and total strangers. This inspires a level of ambition and commitment much greater than is fuelled by the incentive of ‘getting good marks’.

The public display also raises the number of stakeholders

in the project – particularly if the school has been a ‘base camp’ throughout the enquiry process, and students have gone out into the community and made contact with those now coming to see their finished project. This a powerful set of learning relationships to have, and a meaningful source of validation and critique.

Learning Futures schools have held a wide range of exhibitions and presentations of learning:

At Deansfield Community School, students worked with professionals at Lighthouse Media Centre, Wolverhampton Art Gallery, The Arena Theatre and Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club. Students talked about taking their work more seriously and feeling like ‘professionals’, knowing their work was going to be displayed in what they called ‘proper venues’.

FROM OUR BLOG:

‘THE WAR PROJECT’ AT MATTHEW MOSS

Wow, this group have needed real scrutiny and provocation. Started off wanting to cover 1,000 years of warfare using every media possible including a poignant slideshow set to music, as a token attempt to offset their glorification of massive military power everywhere else. Finally got them to look at atomic weapons, starting with Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Unsatisfactory first few sessions with one lad nipping home one break time for a BB gun, and a cover lesson when I was out during

which they produced some posters cluttered with guns and knives of all descriptions and conducted an alarmingly crude Google search for ‘bombs’.

But we’ve got there now and their project is looking like it could well eclipse many of the others due to the depth of learning underway.

The number of books brought from the library each lesson, the close-reading going on, the vociferousness of questioning and debate, all bode really well. Our Learning Support Assistant’s MA in History is being exploited mercilessly (Cold War, Cuban Missile crisis, size of current arsenals), and one of the

outcomes will be a ‘Weakest Link’-style quiz, with ‘rock hard’ questions researched and presented by the group.

It just goes to show that the teacher’s role within student-led projects is far from one of redundancy, or having the time to put the kettle on.

Without scrutiny, challenge and intervention, this could have been a project with a terrible impact: as it is we have got through the lurid fascination with war and expressions of power and reached the space of ‘Adult’ learning about war, with a palpably positive energy now driving the work.

*What, to my mind, made this project a success for the vast majority of students was giving them a genuine freedom to take responsibility for their own work and to be the true beneficiaries of its success.*

RACHEL KERSHAW, TEACHER, BIDDENHAM INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

At Yewlands Technology College the school itself was the venue for a Year 7 showcase event, inviting parents, governors, and staff to come into school to view the work the students have been producing in Humanities, IT, and Design. Catering was provided ‘in-house’ by a team of students who prepared a buffet for the 150 visitors that attended. Many of the parents who attended asked if showcases could become regular events, across all subjects.

The Yewlands Learning Futures coordinator observed that, apart from providing a showcase for student work, ‘the event created a perfect opportunity to advertise other initiatives which were happening in school and show the parents how to access work and homework from home via an online portal.’

Exhibitions like this provide more than just an incentive for the projects: hosting an exhibition of learning and inviting the community is a step towards transforming a school into a ‘Learning Commons’.

Learner autonomy

A key finding from the Learning Futures interim evaluation is that students tend to be most engaged in projects when they are in control of the topic they choose and the path they navigate through their enquiry. As the example of the ‘War’ project at Matthew Moss High School demonstrates, even unpromising topics can lead to fruitful enquiry with support and (as important) challenge from staff and fellow students.





## ENQUIRY-BASED LEARNING

The teacher's role is to create the conditions for learning to take place (in fact, this is the most a teacher can do in any classroom – it is invariably the student, not the teacher, who decides whether or not they will learn). This does not diminish the importance of the teacher's enthusiasm for (and knowledge of) their subject. Student passions are valuable, but teacher passions are valuable too and can inspire a student to take on a theme that they had never considered before. We often develop our passions because somebody else introduced us to them.

### The 'So What' factor

A strong sense of moral purpose drives passionate teachers. What is less often recognised is that moral purpose drives passionate learning too. At Cramlington Learning Village, this imperative is captured in the expression 'So What?'. It refers to a requirement that students' projects have a purpose that goes beyond their own learning, so they ask 'who will benefit from my project? How will it contribute to the well-being of the school, the community, or indeed the planet?'

Asking 'So What?' is a simple exercise that can have a transformative effect on learning.

Finally, it is important not to assume that enquiry is only good for students. At their best, schools are 'communities of learners' in which students and staff conduct enquiries, and carry out extended projects. For many of our schools, developing enquiry-based learning may have started in the classroom, but has now enthused the staff-room, and is creating a culture of research and experimentation in pedagogy itself.

### SUMMARY

Enquiry-based learning that starts with students' interests is a route to engagement because it puts students in charge of what they learn and how they learn it, while their teachers and peers support, challenge, and stretch them – helping them to develop into 'expert learners.'

Enquiry is most powerful when it is conducted as part of an extended, scaffolded project that breaks students out of the restrictions of the 'standard' timetable and concludes with a public exhibition of the students' products or findings.



# SCHOOL AS 'BASE CAMP'

A genuine 21st century school should be a base camp rather than a single destination – a place where students meet to explore learning opportunities that take them into their communities, onto the web, and to local businesses and employers. It should also be a hub that creates connections with families, and with learning partners beyond school.

With ever-more opportunities for learning appearing (through digital technologies and informal learning contexts), schools are in danger of becoming peripheral to students' lives. Schools see themselves as the centres of children's learning, too often disregarding the contexts and potential contributions of the wider aspects of students' learning. Charles Leadbeater illustrates these locations for learning (see fig.2).<sup>10</sup>

However, seen from a students' perspective the view is rather different (see fig.3). To them, school is only one

among many locations where learning takes place (and not necessarily the most important).

In order to engage with the full spectrum of their students' learning, schools need to connect with all these locations. One organisation that has taken this to heart is Big Picture, which has opened over sixty schools in the USA, Canada, Australia, Israel, and the Netherlands. Big Picture co-founder Elliot Washor (writing with Charles Mojkowski) regards the health of the community as fundamental to the health of a school, though school leaders tend to ignore it:

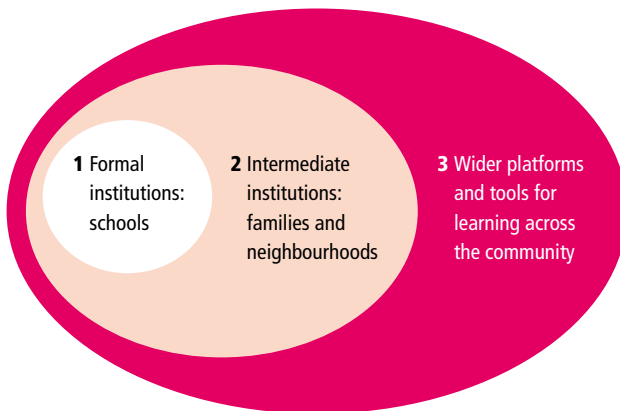


Fig. 2 LOCATIONS FOR LEARNING (AFTER CHARLES LEADBEATER)

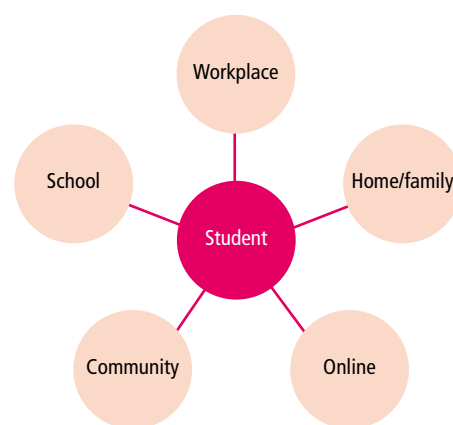


Fig. 3 THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE (AFTER CHARLES LEADBEATER)

*'When the child gets into the schoolroom he has to put out of his mind a large part of the ideas, interests, and activities that predominate in his home and neighbourhood.'*

JOHN DEWEY, *THE SCHOOL AND SOCIETY* (1899)

*Consumed with reforming what goes on inside schools, most principals in urban high schools might argue that they are much too busy to deal with the community outside those walls, failing to understand that such an investment of time and energy will yield enormous gains in terms of strengthening the community within<sup>11</sup>.*

It isn't just Big Picture that advocates this wider focus: around the world, educators are blurring the boundaries between school and community, in programmes such as El Sistema in Venezuela (where children facing deprivation in areas of high crime are taught through music programmes), or Escuela Nueva in Colombia and India (where 'open schools' seek to empower communities). These provide powerful examples of student engagement – aspects of which can be incorporated into mainstream formal contexts. These new approaches are examined in *Learning From The Extremes*, by Charles Leadbeater and Annika Wong<sup>12</sup>, which argues that real transformation in education systems is most likely to occur when disruptive innovation takes hold in informal learning settings.

The schools featured in this section are committed to the concept of 'school as base camp', so that students' high expectations and aspirations can be met through the utilisation, and embedding, of partnerships and locations beyond the school gates.

## BENEFITS OF 'SCHOOL AS BASE CAMP'

**The route to 'being like':** Learning Futures schools are seeking to develop pedagogies which transform the identity of the learner from 'recipient of information' to thinking (and being) like a scientist, geographer, artist, entrepreneur, etc. When the Harris Federation Student Commission on Learning visits schools in New York, San Diego, or Rochdale, they are curriculum developers, researchers, documentary makers. If Enquiry-based Learning stays within the confines of school, the learning can appear contrived or inauthentic – seeing school as base camp adds authority to enquiry.

**Supports independent and informal learning:** as online social media make information instantly accessible, students in school have the capacity to access external experts anywhere, anytime.

## FROM OUR BLOG: MOUNTAIN-CLIMBING AT MATTHEW MOSS

Four girls are going to scale the Old Man of Coniston. They have booked the mini bus and driver, raised money to pay for a guide, and have booked him over the phone. They are now learning

about mountain safety and the geology of the Old Man. They have come up with an inspirational challenge for themselves and have negotiated matched-funding with the school Business Manager and consulted with a PE teacher about risk assessment. They are exhibiting

so much more agency, independence, confidence and fundamental nous than a traditionally-taught Yr 7 group would, but why take the foot off the gas? Why not see how much daylight we can create between themselves and their traditionally-taught colleagues?



**Improved student attainment:** the OFSTED Report into Learning Outside The Classroom<sup>13</sup> found that students not only remembered the emotion and excitement of such experiences, but also the learning which went with it. More importantly, perhaps, the report also identified a link between schools judged ‘improving’ or ‘outstanding’ and support for learning outside the school walls.

**Skills for life:** in interviews with Learning Futures evaluators, students identified a host of valuable life skills which they have developed through sustained learning outside the classroom, including:

- Resilience when faced with challenge;
- Literacy and articulacy;
- Improved team-working skills;
- How to learn from strangers;
- Being ‘adult’ in negotiations;
- Confidence and self-awareness;
- Making better choices.

‘BASE CAMP’ BARRIERS

There are a number of organisational, technological and pedagogical barriers that prevent schools from seeing themselves as ‘base camps’ for learning:

Organisational barriers

It is difficult to create a directory of supportive organisations and individuals that is wide enough to respond to the breadth of student initiatives and interests, but ‘kept warm’ through regular involvement. Matthew Moss High School is creating a fund for ‘Just-In-Time’ learning experts, who are child-safety checked in advance and are able to respond to learners as their needs arise.

Perhaps the major organisational barrier is the ‘tyranny of the timetable’, which in many schools is a rigid constraint around which learning must somehow be organised. However, some schools succeed in creating flexibility in their use of time and this needs to become the norm if powerful offsite learning is not to be precluded.



Independent enquiry in a classroom with no computers doesn’t work. It’s like baking a cake with no oven.

KAYTE JUDGE, BIDDENHAM

For example, Haybridge school has adopted a timetable based on half-day units. Matthew Moss High School devotes 2 days per week to the My World enquiry based curriculum.

Technological barriers

The internet has transformed the nature of research more drastically than any invention since the printing press: information that used to take weeks to find can now be found in minutes. But student researchers working in schools face some barriers:

- **Scarcity of computers:** access to them needs to be managed so everyone can get to them when they are needed;
- **Internet firewalls and blocked sites:** understandably, students in school are rarely given access to the entire contents of the internet. But this can lead to extremely useful sites being blocked, with no means of temporarily lifting the barricade;
- **Home internet access:** students’ access to the internet from home varies widely between households. This is a serious and potentially invisible issue for students engaged in extended projects: lack of home access to the internet led two students to drop out of one Learning Futures project.

These potential barriers to internet access need to be taken into account early on in the project planning process.

Pedagogical barriers

Some teachers find it difficult to work as a facilitator and manager of learning, rather than as a source of expertise. Some are uncomfortable working in cross-subject project teams, others have resisted working outside their classroom domain. While most have been

FROM OUR BLOG: STUDYING CCTV AT CRAMLINGTON

Jordon is not by any means the best worker; he is a reluctant learner. Getting him to use Project Wednesday was a real challenge. However, the freedom to differentiate my time meant that I can co-construct some of the tasks with students.

Jordon’s group wanted to study the impact of CCTV on people’s behaviour. We agreed that he would collect primary evidence, using a video camera, from the local shopping centre. He had to negotiate with the security guard at the centre for permission, borrow the school’s camera, undertake the task, get his learning log signed by the security guard, interpret the evidence, create an analysis and synthesis of findings (CCTV impacts negatively on young people’s behaviour who act up in front of the cameras, but has no discernable effect on adults) and then present his findings to his group. He is now researching the data protection act.

re-energised by working with external experts, some have felt threatened.

Equally, those who believe in the primacy of ‘subjects’ often raise valid concerns that placing student work in responsive mode to community or business needs, and having a diverse set of group or individual challenges, cannot guarantee that subject-specific knowledge is adequately covered.

Transforming a school into a ‘base camp for learning’ is challenging work. To genuinely build a curriculum around it requires persistence, a long-term vision, consistency of purpose, and much careful planning. The majority of secondary schools conclude that it is best left in the margins, for the occasional school outing. Learning Futures



## SCHOOL AS 'BASE CAMP'

schools have encountered a multitude of challenges, yet many have chosen to go still further towards establishing a connecting hub for learning by extending the range of partners, number of staff involved, and length of time allotted outside the classroom.

Why are they doing this? Simply, because the extra work is more than offset by their students' enthusiasm for powerful learning beyond the school.

### SUMMARY

A 21st century school should not be the final destination for learning, but a place where students meet to explore learning opportunities that take them into their communities, onto the web, and to local businesses and other organisations. This outward-facing orientation grounds the school in the students' lives, and provides them with paths to explore the wider world.

A number of barriers face a school trying to become a base camp, including timetable limitations, safeguarding concerns, transportation costs, and limitations to internet access. Also, in order to become a base camp a school must re-think its approach to the curriculum, because learning outside school will not adhere to the restrictions of a tightly-controlled syllabus.

Becoming a 'base camp' is not a superficial shift—it requires a serious transformation of teaching and learning within a school, but one that can enrich the experiences of students, staff, and the wider community.

### FROM OUR BLOG:

#### LEARNING GOES BEYOND SCHOOL AT BIDDENHAM

Biddenham International School have been working with Good Things Ltd., a local business, to ensure their Learning Futures work – called 'The Project' – is appropriately placed for both their mainstream and home-educated students. Both sets of students undertake most of their project work outside the classroom and all are encouraged to find 'community experts' to help with their areas of enquiry.

For home-educated students learning in the community has been the norm, but through 'The Project' they are encouraged to engage with people other than their usual educators. One home-educated student, Amy Jones, tackled the question 'What do children with special educational needs get from horse riding (and how can this be improved)?' by designing and delivering activities for Elizabeth Curtis Centre for Riding for the Disabled. The centre has made changes to their classes as a result of her project. Another, Joseph Mullan, addressed the question 'What factors make a competitive dinghy sailor successful?' through extensive research with the Olympic dinghy sailing team. His results have been taken on board by the team's coach.

In all of these cases the home-educated children benefitted from their freedom from the constraints of the school day. Mainstream Biddenham students also began talking about their learning as taking place outside of the classroom – neighbours and aunties featured high on the list of people helping the students to access the information and cultivate skills they needed to complete their enquiries.





# EXTENDED LEARNING RELATIONSHIPS

The 21st century heralds the possibility of a system redesign that can genuinely respond to the needs of learners and the demands for anytime/anywhere learning, collaborative and independent learning, and personalised learning.

Traditional learning relationships were designed predominantly with teacher as didact/student as recipient. Reforms shaped by school improvement research added the concept of pastoral care and more careful monitoring of academic progress (the ‘tutorial’). This model has endured, despite the arrival of a more socially connected digital world, perhaps because it seemed appropriate for the target-driven culture of the past two decades.

But a more personalised offer to students recognises that motivation, engagement, and social and emotional development matter, and that students increasingly need to invest in, direct, and ‘own’ their learning. The phenomenal rise in the diversity of social media networks that offer support are in sharp contrast to the,

often limited, options for learning support available in mainstream schooling. Compared with the way young people support each other informally, our formal support systems often seem ponderous and inflexible.

Learning Futures schools have been introducing a range of innovations which not only radically expand the range of people building learning relationships with students, but which incorporate more malleable strategies for supporting students. We have also seen significant changes in the format which shapes relationships: supplementing face-to-face with online, complementing individual support with ‘open forum’ advisories, students submitting work for public presentation and individual peer assessment. All these variables can be present within a single school, tailored to individual student’s needs.



The mentors encouraged the pupils and will continue to communicate with them through email. It was great to hear the buzz in the room of 4 different languages being spoken at once! We are now exploring the use of Skype for further communication between the mentors and pupils.

BLOG, LINTON VILLAGE COLLEGE

## Tutor, Expert, Mentor, Coach

Learning Futures has identified four powerful roles for supporting learning: tutor, expert, mentor, and coach. The different characteristics of these roles are not always consciously felt – a skilled teacher can adopt all four roles within a single lesson. Nor are their definitions universally shared: definitions of coaching and mentoring, for example, are often interchangeable and sometimes contradictory. We have adopted the definition of coaching used in sport, the area with which it is most commonly identified.

We define the four key roles as follows:

- **Tutor:** the tutor’s role deploys a wide range of teaching strategies including direct instruction, making presentations, and facilitating discussions. The role also includes planning to ensure learning outcomes are achieved. Whilst usually the teacher’s direct responsibility, aspects of tutoring may also be adopted by teaching assistants, trainees, and even students;
- **Expert:** an expert can interact with students to offer injections of deep knowledge and experience, usually to enhance the tutor’s input. Experts are usually professionals in a given field, though they may also be knowledgeable amateurs. They often come from officially-sanctioned partner organisations, though any school will have a parent body rich in expertise that it can call upon;
- **Mentor:** a mentor offers sustained guidance, information, and support to students, so that their attitude and commitment to learning, and their personal development, are supported;
- **Coach:** a coach helps build students’ skills, techniques, and capacities in specific areas, subjects, or disciplines, usually with the aim of improved student achievement.

## FROM OUR BLOG:

PARENTS LEARN HOW TO BE COACHES AT NOADSWOOD

In partnership with Waitrose, Noadswood have been developing a ‘coaching for learning’ programme, which offers students support from a range of sources: teachers, peers and parents. The following passage describes a training session for parent coaches:

*I have been fortunate enough to witness one of the most absorbing examples of learner engagement that I have seen in a long time, and the learners were parents. Today, Chris, Sam and Ann of the Waitrose Group took 60 of our parents on a voyage of personal discovery that brought them a step closer to being their children’s learning coaches. As the day went on it was almost possible to hear the parent-teen barriers being dismantled one by one as our parents were expertly led through self-evaluation, empathetic communication, the sort of questioning that moves situations from A to B, and lots of listening.*

*Today wasn’t about imparting revision techniques or strategies for reciting times tables, it was all about nurturing the relationships that support learning. What became abundantly clear as the day progressed was just how strained these relationships can be and the importance of our role in offering guidance and support.*



Teachers, Parents, Other Adults and Peers:  
the new cast of extended learning relationships

As roles have diversified, so too has the range of those contributing to improved learning relationships. Teachers have continued to be the principal actors, but Learning Futures schools are making significant progress in enabling parents to play an important part in deepening their children’s engagement.

Involving other adults in enquiry-based learning strengthens the authenticity of the task in hand for students. Schools are successfully deploying other adults in supervising and assessing student projects, as well as bringing enquiry-based problems to be solved within local communities. The added relevance their involvement brings significantly enhances learner motivation.

Teaching, coaching, and mentoring are not only of benefit to the recipient. Students carrying out these roles have improved their own confidence, sense of responsibility, self-esteem, and learning.

Of all the additional resources available to schools wishing to extend learning relationships, however, the greatest – and least utilised – is that of current and recently graduated students. These learning relationships are valuable both for the recipients and for the providers – who improve their confidence, sense of responsibility, and learning. Students in Learning Futures schools have taken on all four roles (tutor, expert, mentor, coach), with impressive results.

- **Students as Tutors:** at Samuel Whitbread, disengaged Year 11 students who have trouble reading and writing have been working with Year 5 students at Bloomfield Primary School in an English class once a week. One Bloomfield student reports that ‘we remember more when the Year elevens teach us.’
- **Students as Experts:** Samuel Whitbread students nominated a sixth-form student – an avid pastry chef – to undertake a health and safety qualification so that catering for a week-long residential could be provided by the students.
- **Students as Mentors:** peer mentors from the Harris Federation of South London Schools have been trained and now meet their mentees every week at break time, with extremely positive early outcomes. A mentor comments that ‘it’s helped me to improve my own responsibility’; a mentee comments that ‘I cope better with things. The meetings are fun and a good outlet’.
- **Students as Coaches:** a gap-year student at Thomas Hardy School coaches Year 12 students in Maths. She feels that students can be more open with her than with their teacher: ‘they feel confident around me and they’re happy to say “I can’t do it”’.

Tutoring, coaching, and mentoring are not only of benefit to the recipient: students carrying out these roles have improved their own confidence, sense of responsibility, self-esteem, and learning.

One of the key features of the project is the development of our Competency Curriculum through the partners and locations, working with real life briefs to practice the skills done in the classroom.

BLOG, DEANSFIELD COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Speaking the same language

A shared language for learning is critical to ensuring that extended learning relationships work effectively for students, teachers, and other adults. In too many schools, teachers are perceived as the sole experts of what powerful learning looks like, and the only ones who are fluent in the language used to describe it. Such perceptions prevent many parents and students from playing an equal part in learning conversations.

The Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI)

ELLI<sup>14</sup> is one example of a powerful tool for overcoming this and making the language of learning transparent, accessible, and ubiquitous. It is a self-assessment tool that students can use to both plot and measure their development as learners. At its heart are seven ‘dimensions of learning power’:

- **Changing and learning:** a sense of oneself as someone who learns and changes over time;
- **Critical curiosity:** a desire to ‘get beneath the surface’ of content;
- **Meaning making:** making connections between ideas and information, and interpreting learning in the context of one’s own experiences;
- **Creativity:** risk-taking, playfulness, imagination and intuition;
- **Interdependence:** learning with and from others (though also being capable of working alone);
- **Strategic awareness:** being aware of one’s thoughts, feelings and actions, and using that awareness to manage learning processes;
- **Resilience:** the readiness to persevere in the face of difficulties.

CASE STUDY

Scaffolding motivation at Thomas Hardy School

Thomas Hardy has developed two powerful strategies for enabling their students (particularly those needing most support) to become more resilient, independent, and responsible learners: **motivational interviewing** and **ex-students as learning coaches**.

**Motivational Interviewing** is a student-centred counselling technique for eliciting behaviour change by helping students to explore and resolve ambivalence around their motivation to learn. Staff have been trained to use non-confrontational, non-judgemental techniques involving reflective listening and goal setting. They serve as ‘inquisitive listeners’ so that students discover their own routes to behavioural change. The approach has proved particularly effective with ‘school dissidents’ – students who are vocally critical of a system they feel is letting them down.

Ex-students working as learning coaches

include Alice, a successful young designer, who coaches students in Design and Technology. A teacher writes:  
*Alice isn’t an extra pair of hands in the classroom, she isn’t a Teaching Assistant, she isn’t merely a resource; she’s an inspiration to students, she’s ‘what I can be and what I want to be and what I will be if I listen to her’. She can make people listen who don’t listen to teachers.*

Giving students a language (and a tool) for analysing their own strengths and weaknesses as learners enables them to chart their next steps in improving attainment and engagement, thus affirming their own autonomy – one of the key principles behind strong learning relationships.

#### **AUTONOMY, FREQUENCY, QUALITY: CHARACTERISTICS OF GREAT LEARNING RELATIONSHIPS**

The fragmented nature of secondary school – in which tutors often see students for only a few hours a week – prevents teachers from being aware of the totality of the young person's learning experience, their ambitions, their ultimate success as learners. And while teacher-student interaction is fragmented, teacher-parent interaction is even more so, confined to occasional meetings and often-unexplained marks and test scores sent home to them.

It does not need to be this way – and increasingly, in Learning Futures schools, it isn't. We have looked beyond national boundaries for examples of next practice. Two of our international partners, The High Tech High schools in California, and the Kunskapsskolan schools in Sweden, have developed a deep understanding of how to structure a set of extended relationships to support learning. They share a similar practice: that of the advisory.

At High Tech High, advisories are founded around four themes: community, college, culture, and career. Cross-age groups meet weekly, supplemented by individual advisor support sessions and monthly peer group 'buddy' activities. Advisors visit their advisees' homes annually, and serve as the first contact for parents. Goal-setting forms an essential part of advisories and students are encouraged to select and facilitate agendas.

Sweden's Kunskapsskolan schools allocate seven hours of each student's week to similar advisory activities. Each group meets their advisor at the start of every day, to plan which classes they will attend, and also at the end of each day, for reflection. Each student sets – with advice – their own goals and 'learning steps', though these goals are frequently revised and changed. It is a highly personalised system, around which all teaching is based.

Through the work of such exemplars, three characteristics of successful learning relationships can be discerned: **autonomy, frequency, and quality**.

#### **Autonomy**

It may seem contradictory to highlight the principle of autonomy while significantly increasing the number of adults and peers playing a part in supporting learning. But the leap from a culture where students are 'spoon-fed' information and answers to one where learners are required to think for themselves is a large one, and needs structured and targeted support. Learning Futures schools have repeatedly seen that when students are given more control over their learning they rise to the challenge this presents. For with autonomy, comes responsibility. Whenever students have been supported to make their own choices, they understand the need to become more self-disciplined and self-critical. The results of this greater autonomy and responsibility (even in very young learners) frequently surpass expectations.

One yardstick by which a commitment to greater student autonomy can be judged, is in the allocation of learning mentors or tutorial leaders. Best practice in student support repeatedly links a productive relationship back to the principle of students choosing their preferred mentor. Yet this is usually the exception, not the rule, in

## *Our question is, why are adults so very scared of starting partnerships with students?*

STUDENT BLOG, HARRIS FEDERATION OF SOUTH LONDON SCHOOLS

most schools. Schools, in their defence, argue that tutor schedules and staff allocations don't allow for free choice, but such arrangements suggest that learning support is still being done to and for students rather than with and by. Using fewer tutors, with greater expertise and suitability, ought to be achievable if sufficient priority is given to student support.

Learning Futures schools adhere strongly to the belief that students should become independent learners, though, in reality, this effectively involves more interdependent learning – independent learners inevitably rely upon a wide range of people, resources, and places to support their enquiry.

#### **Frequency**

The frequency which is afforded to fostering learning relationships is also critical. In an overcrowded curriculum, time devoted to supporting students in planning and reviewing their learning tends to get squeezed out, but such support must be allocated space and time on a regular basis. Time of day is also important: effective coaching and mentoring is less likely to happen at the end of a long day than at the start of one.

#### **Quality**

Even the best frameworks for supporting learning relationships will fail if insufficient care is given to the quality of those relationships. Recognising the importance of this, the Harris Federation of South London Schools is committed to supporting students as tutors and learning coaches through a

structured training programme. At Noadswood School near-to-peer subject mentors are themselves mentored by teaching staff.

The pressures upon schools to revert to the restricted, bounded model of teacher-student as the only practical relationship which supports learning are understandable. With all the attendant responsibilities which schools carry, and the complexity of curricular and extra-curricular demands, the easiest option is to 'default' to directing individual teachers to deliver a pre-set curriculum, without attending to any of the other learning relationships that students (and staff) are developing both within and outside school. It's also easy to treat 'student support' as a bolt-on service – useful, but not integral, to the real business of teaching and learning. The experience of the Learning Futures programme schools challenges and confounds these preconceptions.

#### **SUMMARY**

**Schools are rich in potential learning relationships. They can expand their range of relationships through enabling students – as well as other adults – to take on the roles of 'tutor', 'expert', 'mentor', and 'coach'.**

**Developing a shared language for learning is critical to developing meaningful learning relationships, and three characteristics are found in successful practice: autonomy, frequency, and quality.**

# SCHOOL AS ‘LEARNING COMMONS’

During the first year of Learning Futures, students have begun using school as a ‘base camp’ for enquiries that take them into the community, thereby expanding their learning relationships. At the same time, the number of people with a shared interest in the life of the school is growing and relationships within school are becoming less hierarchical. This has led to a shift of mindset and purpose, a new role for the school within the community, and a new set of principles driving learning. Learning Futures schools are beginning to see themselves, individually and collectively, as a ‘learning commons’.

The notion of the commons is historically linked to land and its shared usage. A commons becomes a shared space with shared resources. Everyone in the community has access to it, and everyone shares responsibility for it. In England, the land enclosure movement of the 15th and 16th centuries drastically reduced the availability of common land, and triggered mass civil unrest.

Commentators have seen parallels between the enclosure movement, as it affected land ownership, and the recent economic meltdown, as fuelled by corporate greed and financial irresponsibility. Elsewhere, the growing sense that the ‘common good’ needs to re-assert itself in opposition to these forces is increasingly seen in debates on the environment, freedom of information, media monopolies, and a host of other burning issues.

CASE STUDY

Cultivating an eco-garden at Matthew Moss

Matthew Moss High School has an ‘eco-garden’ on its grounds, tended by students and staff throughout the year. The garden has become both a meeting-spot and a study area, as one Matthew Moss student explains:

*The eco-garden in summertime is very popular for people to discuss work and to do their homework together at dinnertime. Sometimes during lessons in summer teachers decide to do specific lessons. It is a very beautiful scenario and a relaxing summer and a wonderful feeling. It also provides a very nice lunch*

*break and leaves you in a calm relaxing way ready and fresh ready for your next lessons.*

As part of My World, every Year 7 group has allocated a strip of ‘allotment’ in the garden, and they have been conducting tests on the soil and growing vegetables.

No-one ‘owns’ the eco-garden, but everyone benefits from it (as a place to spend time, a source of knowledge, and a producer of vegetables), and everyone shares responsibility for it– though in practice, a smaller self-selected group will steward it. Thus, it serves as both a metaphor and a means for making a school into a ‘learning commons’.

*A common school is ... a school of many different projects, not just projects for learning, but also projects with the local community that the school serves.*

MICHAEL FIELDING AND PETER MOSS, RADICAL EDUCATION AND THE COMMON SCHOOL: A DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVE

But not, curiously, in education.

In recent years school have certainly become more ‘enclosed’. As their means of production (curriculum, assessment, pedagogy, out-of-school learning) have become increasingly constrained and bounded, it is inevitable, perhaps, that schools have been disparagingly referred to as ‘factories’. Concerns over child safety and litigation have also physically turned schools into enclosed spaces.

Moreover, for students (and staff), schools can feel like enclosures: collaboration is not always encouraged (particularly not across year groups or departments), Head teachers are expected to aim for a narrow set of centrally-determined targets and schools are treated as self-contained entities, separate from both the life of the community and the wider lives of the students.

But just as schools acting as a ‘base camp’ for their students to extend their learning beyond school – into communities and businesses– has mutual benefits, seeing school as a centre of learning for all to delve in to – including parents, social and community organisations – enriches the experience for all, especially young people.

Learning Futures has begun to ask what a school organised on the principles of shared responsibility and shared benefit would look like, and the Learning Futures schools are providing concrete examples of how this vision can be made real. The transformation is occurring within three interrelated cultures:

- A Culture of Co-construction;
- A Culture of Collaborative Enquiry;
- A Culture of Democratic Community.



A CULTURE OF CO-CONSTRUCTION

In recent years ‘co-construction’ has been primarily seen in terms of consulting students about curriculum design, but the concept of co-construction can equally apply to pedagogy, assessment, and – as we have seen – projects within the community.

A culture of co-construction is built upon the principle of mutuality: the expectation that everybody has a stake



in the school's well-being. And, if everybody shares responsibility for the school's well-being, it follows that everybody should play a role in deciding the school's direction. At this point teachers and students become partners in their learning, rather than providers and consumers of learning. It is no coincidence that Learning Futures schools that have been co-constructing pedagogy have lessened their reliance upon transmissive teaching that establishes a 'provider-consumer' relationship.

#### FROM OUR BLOG: CO-CONSTRUCTION AT VILLIERS HIGH SCHOOL

Every fortnight, the Year 8 students at Villiers High School in Southall spend part of Friday taking a course that they (or their peers) co-designed with staff based on student 'needs' and 'wants'. These projects have included 'How to be a doctor', 'Public Speaking', 'Do the Write Thing', and 'Gang Culture', and the alarming-sounding 'Can you Survive the Challenge?' (actually focused on collaborative problem-solving).

This is what two students had to say about the project:

*I think Learning Futures has pros and cons. This is because at times children choose certain projects because of their friends and maybe because they expect something fascinating to happen. For example, some people choose 'films' because of the cameras not because of what the project is about. But the good thing about learning futures is that we get to choose independently and work together as a team.*

*We all planned these lessons together as a team with the teachers, choosing themes such as 'how to become*

#### A CULTURE OF COLLABORATIVE ENQUIRY

A striking feature of Learning Futures has been the encouragement of innovation, research, professional development, and experimentation, often beginning with a small team of innovators but spreading throughout the schools. It is as though creating more enquiry-led learning opportunities for students has whetted the appetite of staff to pursue their own professional enquiry. In effect, Learning Futures itself has become an enquiry project.

*a fashion designer', 'how to become a doctor'. Right now I have chosen 'do the write thing'. I have chosen this because I think I can become a poet. This choice will help me decide and move up another new level towards what I think I can become in future.*

ZINITA RATHOD

*Learning Futures has been everything I was told it would be. The kinds of enquiry projects we had for choices surprised me – but I knew that we needed a variety so that everyone would be interested in something.*

*'How to be a Doctor' really interested me, as it is my ambition to become one. The project was very entertaining and I loved the fact that the people who were in the project with me had the same interests, concerns and questions.*

*Learning Futures really inspired me to try and think about what I need to learn rather than what I want. I've learnt that these are two very different things and being able to tell the difference is a very great achievement indeed.*

GINA SAJITH

*I enjoyed working with the teachers ... it's made me feel more confident and I feel the teachers are interested in what I think.*

YEAR 7 STUDENT, BIRCHES HEAD HIGH SCHOOL

Collaborative enquiry can be infectious, but is also fragile and needs more time than most schools allocate for planning and professional development – as well as venues for sharing practice across the staff. Because of this 'innovation teams' are most effective when they have been given 'official sanction', including dedicated time to conduct, disseminate, and reflect on their enquiries.

As the Learning Futures evaluation notes:

*Staff reflected positively on the importance of shared responsibility and commitment to pioneer new ways of doing things, inspired by a common vision for enabling students to take responsibility for their own learning, over time. This required the willingness, and the courage, collectively to challenge the 'conventional paradigm' of schooling and to experiment with new approaches to learning.*

Some schools have devised ways to ensure that staff can share their professional enquiries. In the Humanities department at Cramlington Learning Village, for example, classes are merged so that two teachers are given responsibility for 60 students. This allows teachers to plan together (often across disciplines), and adds further flexibility to the timetable. At Yewlands Technology College teachers regularly present their innovations to the rest of their colleagues. At Haybridge, teachers within Unlocking Learning are given the opportunity to gain a qualification in Emotional Literacy, which underpins enquiry-based learning. A particularly comprehensive example of a culture of professional enquiry is in practice at the

Learning Futures partner school High Tech High, in San Diego county, where every day has an hour set aside (importantly, at the start of the day, before tiredness and daily pressures have built) during which staff collaboratively plan, research, or assess student work. Videographers work within the school, and staff are enabled to critique and build their practice on the basis of video recordings of it.

#### Staff and students collaborating in enquiry

The shift to a culture of collaborative enquiry has led to two key changes. The first is a shared willingness on the part of teachers, students, and parents to experiment in teaching and learning. Widening the participants in research and enquiry fosters a more informed and reassured set of partners, as noted by the Haybridge School Learning Futures Coordinator:

*Feedback at the Parent/Carer Forum was positive after they took part in identifying what skills they believed students should have and develop. We are now setting out to engage businesses and universities in order to give a context for the skills we are developing in school.*

The second is a marked behavioural change in the students involved in enquiry. A teacher explains the shift in an interview with the evaluation team:

*The students used to come and the culture was quite simply 'You educate me, so I'm going to come and I'm going to sit, and you do what you've got to do and then I'll leave'. Whereas actually what we're getting now is a culture of engagement, of involvement, of opportunity, and that's something that we've not had before.*

### A CULTURE OF DEMOCRATIC COMMUNITY

If schools authentically develop a culture of co-construction and collaborative enquiry, a more democratic, communal culture will emerge. However, many schools remain unwilling to fully recognise students, and their parents, as equal members of the 'learning commons'.

Learning Futures schools have found that democratising their structures and relationships has had a transformative effect upon student engagement, and their own engagement with parents and their local communities. It makes sense academically, too. A Harvard University meta-analysis<sup>15</sup> shows a strong association between parental involvement and student achievement.

More and more people are envisaging schools as communal, open institutions. Anthony Seldon, writing for the influential Centre for Policy Studies, has called for schools to 'be free to be open to the local community at all hours'<sup>16</sup> and for more active parent and community bodies. The Human Scale Education movement emphasises dialogue, student voice in the organisation of the school, and breaking large schools down into smaller proportions of staff and students. This is not to say that a culture of democratic community is non-hierarchical. Teachers are members of the 'learning commons' who have expertise in creating the right conditions for learning. They are in a position to manage learning in a way that no one else can. They have responsibilities (for discipline, student outcomes, safety, and well-being) that demand that they are in a more powerful position than student or parent. However, those responsibilities can best be met through building more respectful relationships between teachers, students, families, and communities.

### FROM OUR BLOG:

#### STUDENT-TEACHER PARTNERSHIPS AT THE HARRIS FEDERATION

A group of over 100 students and staff at the Harris Federation of South London Schools have conducted a major enquiry into teaching and learning methods, over two years. The Harris Executive have committed to implementing their findings in creating innovative and engaging curriculum and pedagogy. Students have been interviewing experts on learning, speaking to other students across the globe (via a Skype-enabled overnight 'learn-over'), and visiting innovative schools in Britain and the US.

Students and teachers are collaborating on pilot projects. Here is what one teacher (at Harris Academy Merton) has had to say about two of the projects:

#### Peer mentoring

The Student Commission assisted with setting the direction and agreeing the outcomes on this project, which arose from an identified need to give some students the tools to be more successful in the classroom.

#### Staff-student collaborative teaching

Commissioners were keen to be able to demonstrate their impact in the classroom in the area of Teaching and Learning. Accordingly, they set up a programme which has students planning and delivering lessons in partnership with teachers, and observing and evaluating lessons, feeding back to planners.

## All schools should have a human scale, where children are known and treated as unique individuals.

ANTHONY SELDON, 'AN END TO FACTORY SCHOOLS', CENTRE FOR POLICY STUDIES (2010)

One can picture each of these three cultures as part of a virtuous circle (see fig. 4) A culture of collaborative enquiry creates the knowledge base, and necessary language, for a culture of co-construction; partners engaged in co-constructing learning are establishing the focus and design of a democratic learning community; this in turn can encourage a culture of collaborative enquiry, and so on.

School as 'Learning Commons' is one metaphor to capture the practice and aspirations of Learning Futures schools. It is, however, no throwback to an imagined utopia. In many ways it is more in tune with the globalised, connected world young people inhabit; where the concept of 'open source' – where people voluntarily share their skills for no financial gain (think Wikipedia and the human genome project) – is both a common language and a driver for change.

Above all, Learning Futures schools are filled with what the late Derek Wise, visionary Head teacher at Cramlington Learning Village, called 'pragmatopians': people who understand that vision and aspiration need to be coupled to realism and pragmatism.

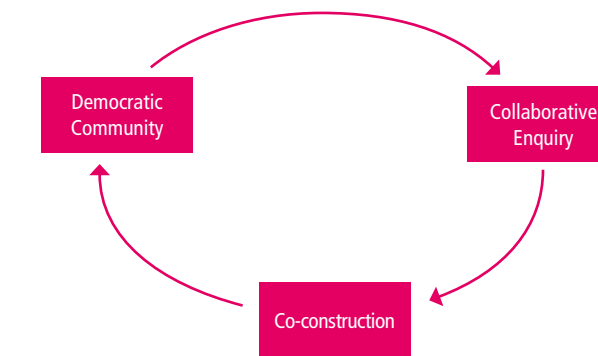


Fig. 4 THE THREE CULTURES





**CASE STUDY****Citizen Democracy at Harlington Area Trust**

A group of students did an enquiry into improving the facilities for young people in their village. As part of the change project, where all students in Year 9 were given free rein to make a change and campaign on anything which they felt passionate about, a small group of girls took it upon themselves to try to make a difference to their local community and improve their environment. They contacted the Parish Council who agreed to meet with them, and attended a meeting at which they were able to argue their case and actively participate in local democracy.

This led to the Parish Council applying for some funds to renovate the Youth Club, which they were successful in securing and – during the summer holidays – the students were planning to redecorate their Youth Centre. All round an excellent example of young people who believe that things can be different, getting the opportunity to make a change in their world, being given the trust and the freedom to choose their own pathway to create a genuine and deep learning experience.

**SUMMARY**

**A commons becomes a shared space with shared resources. Everyone in the community has access to it, and everyone shares responsibility for it.**

**A school becomes a Learning Commons by fostering three interrelated cultures:**

- a culture of co-construction
- a culture of collaborative enquiry
- a culture of democratic community





# WHERE NEXT?

The Learning Futures programme arose from the success of an earlier Paul Hamlyn Foundation special initiative, Musical Futures. Established in 2003, the Musical Futures project is now firmly established in over one-third of all English secondary Music Departments, with a national network of ‘champion’ practitioners and schools and a presence in most music teacher training curricula. Its spread is not limited to England: a significant pilot is already underway in Australia, and further pilots are being planned for the rest of the UK.

Musical Futures has developed a range of free, non-copyrighted classroom materials. These have been tried, tested, shared, and adapted by music teachers around the country. Learning Futures is creating its own set of tools, to support teachers in their pedagogy across all curricular subjects. These will include:

**Enquiry-based Learning Resource Pack:** Combining materials created by practitioners across the world, this will be a practical reference for anyone designing enquiry-based or project-based learning, whether for a single lesson or an entire year’s curriculum.

**EnquiryBlogger:** Developed in partnership with the Open University and University of Bristol, EnquiryBlogger is a tool to support enquiry-based learning. A student will be able to use it to plan an extended project, create a ‘knowledge-map’ of their research, document and reflect on their progress, and self-assess their growth as a learner.

**‘Spaced Learning’ DVD:** Spaced Learning, developed at Monkseaton High School, allows teachers to present (and students to retain) a term’s worth of content in a single lesson. As such, it is both a powerful scaffold for enquiry (because students can begin their enquiry with a high ‘baseline’ level of knowledge) and a means of ensuring that an enquiry-based curriculum does not limit students’ wider knowledge of a subject. Learning Futures is producing a DVD that provides everything you need to design and implement your own Spaced Learning lessons.

**Language Futures:** Linton Village College has developed an innovative model for language learning in which students choose what language they want to learn, and the teacher facilitates their self-led learning using on-line learning programmes, parent and peer support, and helps them to make contact with native speakers. We are producing a ‘how-to guide’ for teachers and school leaders who wish to implement the Language Futures programme at their school.

*Disaffection with school, evident in high dropout rates and exam failure, suggests there is a pent-up demand for a different kind of school experience—an experience that is more engaging, rewarding and relevant to the skills people will need in the century to come.*

C. LEADBEATER AND A. WONG, *LEARNING FROM THE EXTREMES*, 2010

Learning Futures is also producing a series of generic staff development and diagnostic tools, including:

**Engagement Survey:** This online diagnostic survey of student engagement focuses on students’ engagement in learning, both in and out of school, because we believe this is ultimately more important than the student’s attitude to school. It will be usable as a one-off measure, or as a pre- and post-measure of engagement, measuring the effectiveness of a particular intervention.

**Coaching for Learning DVD:** Developed by Noadswood School, in partnership with Waitrose and the University of Bristol, this DVD will provide training and support for teachers, parents, and students to develop their abilities as ‘learning coaches’ – thereby extending both the range and depth of learning relationships within and beyond school.

Schools who are interested in trialling these tools should join the Learning Futures Community of Interest<sup>17</sup>, or contact us directly at [info@learningfutures.org](mailto:info@learningfutures.org). Tools will be released throughout the next phase of the programme (2010–2011).



In order to share the discoveries made by Learning Futures schools more widely, we will also be publishing in-depth accounts of the innovations being developed at particular schools, including:

- the impact of the Harris Learning Commission on teaching and learning across the **Harris Federation of South London Schools**;
- the shift to an enquiry-based curriculum across Key Stage 3 at **Yewlands School Technology College**; and
- a thorough study of **Biddenham International School’s** unique programme for home-educating families.

The tools will provide the means to achieve the ends advocated in this pamphlet, while the in-depth accounts will show this process in action.

**The ‘Learning Futures Model’**  
Six Learning Futures schools are collaborating to create learning designs that combine the four approaches of engaged schools – Enquiry-based Learning, School as ‘Base Camp’, Extended Learning Relationships, and School as ‘Learning Commons’ – into a unified but flexible pedagogical and structural model<sup>18</sup>.

This is at the heart of Learning Futures’s purpose: to find ways to make learning more engaging, whilst also improving outcomes for students. The schools who are tackling these four themes holistically and at scale are embarking upon a programme, not simply of pedagogical change, but of cultural change too. Their progress, the outcomes for students, and assessment of impact through the University of Bristol evaluation, will be reported on in the next pamphlet.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This pamphlet is dedicated to the work and memory of Derek Wise, CBE, Head teacher at Cramlington Learning Village, who passed away during the writing of it. Everyone involved in Learning Futures will sorely miss Derek for his warmth, wit, wisdom, and inspiration, but we know that the work he started will continue through the CLV staff and the Learning Futures programme.

The pamphlet was written by David Price and Alec Patton, of the Learning Futures team, and edited by Valerie Hannon. Preliminary concepts and ideas were also submitted by David Jackson and Gene Payne. Together with

Rosie Rafferty and Stephen Murtagh, they have supported (and occasionally challenged) the Learning Futures schools and we are grateful to them for their regular guidance and observations. The pamphlet also draws on the work of the Learning Futures Evaluation team, led by Ruth Deakin-Crick.

Most of the quotes and case studies which form the backbone of this pamphlet come from the Learning Futures Coordinators at our 15 partner schools – and, of course, the students.

The layout and design of the pamphlet is the work of Cog Design, and includes photographs taken by Emile Holba.



For more information about Learning Futures, email [info@learningfutures.org](mailto:info@learningfutures.org)

To join the community of interest, visit [www.learningfutures.org](http://www.learningfutures.org) and sign up for updates

ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Next Practice in Teaching & Learning*, Paul Hamlyn Foundation/Innovation Unit (2008)

<sup>2</sup> *Engaging Students*, Paul Hamlyn Foundation/Innovation Unit (2010)

<sup>3</sup> For more information, see the Partnership for 21st Century Skills [www.p21.org](http://www.p21.org)

<sup>4</sup> *The Nature of Learning: Using Research to Inspire Practice*, OECD (2010)

<sup>5</sup> Led by Ruth Deakin-Crick at the University of Bristol

<sup>6</sup> John Hattie, *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*, Routledge (2009)

<sup>7</sup> Robert Geier et al, 'Standardized test outcomes of urban students participating in standards and project based science curricula', *Proceedings of the 6th international conference on Learning sciences* (2004)

<sup>8</sup> Jo Boaler, *Experiencing School Mathematics: Teaching Styles, Sex and Setting*, Open University Press (1997)

<sup>9</sup> These examples come from Brigid J. S. Barron, Daniel L. Schwartz, Nancy J. Vye, Allison Moore, Anthony Petrosino, Linda Zech, John D. Bransford, The Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt, 'Doing with Understanding: Lessons from Research on Problem- and Project-Based Learning' *The Journal of the Learning Sciences* (1998)

<sup>10</sup> Charles Leadbeater, *What's Next: 21 Ideas for 21st Century Learning*, Innovation Unit (2008)

<sup>11</sup> Elliot Washor and Charles Mojkowski, 'High Schools as Communities in Communities', *The New Educator* (2006)

<sup>12</sup> Charles Leadbeater and Annika Wong, *Learning from the Extremes*, Cisco (2010)

<sup>13</sup> *Learning Outside The Classroom: How Far Should You Go?*, OFSTED (2008)

<sup>14</sup> Learn more at [www.ellionline.co.uk](http://www.ellionline.co.uk)

<sup>15</sup> W. Jeynes, 'Parental Involvement and Student Achievement: A Meta-Analysis', *Harvard Research* (2007)

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Seldon, 'An End to Factory Schools', Centre for Policy Studies (2010)

<sup>17</sup> To join the community of interest, visit [www.learningfutures.org](http://www.learningfutures.org) and sign up for updates

<sup>18</sup> Birches Head High School; Cramlington Learning Village; Haybridge High School; Matthew Moss High School; Noadswood School; Villiers High School.

**Paul Hamlyn Foundation**  
The Paul Hamlyn Foundation is one of the UK's largest independent grant-giving organisations. We operate three partly overlapping programmes for our work in the UK: arts, education and learning, and social justice. Each of the three programmes has an open grants scheme focused on particular themes and priorities and also special initiatives through which the Foundation aims to address particular issues in order to make distinctive long-term contributions to improvements in society. The Foundation's Education and Learning Programme supports the development and dissemination of new ideas that can make a significant contribution to young people's learning and achievement. Increasingly we are seeking to achieve system-wide changes and will often support work which others may find challenging or which requires long-term solutions. We often work in partnership with Government or other bodies to achieve maximum impact from our support.  
Find out more at [www.phf.org.uk](http://www.phf.org.uk)

**Innovation Unit**  
Innovation Unit are committed to using the power of innovation to solve social challenges. We have a strong track record of supporting leaders and organisations delivering public services to see and do things differently. They come to us with a problem and we empower them to achieve radically different solutions that offer better outcomes for lower costs. We are a not-for-profit social enterprise and we work to influence public debate, re-shape public policy and transform public services.  
Find out more at [www.innovationunit.org](http://www.innovationunit.org)

# WHAT THE LEARNING FUTURES SITES HAVE BEEN DOING

## Biddenham International School ‘The Project’

‘The Project’ at Biddenham International School, in Bedford, brings together school-based and home-educated children to work on extended projects, culminating in a public exhibition of the students’ work. This has developed out of Biddenham Parent Led and Community Education (PLACE), a unique model for offering support to home-educated students and their families.

## Birches Head High School A Skills-focused curriculum

Birches Head, in Stoke-on-Trent, has been developing a skills-focused curriculum, scaffolded and documented by an online ‘personal skills tracker’ which supports a portfolio of each student’s work. Teams of staff have been developing and testing enquiry-based learning programmes to support skills development, and are currently investigating how a transformative shift in approach toward staff professional development (delivered through a model of creative enquiry and personal, professional knowledge creation) impacts upon classroom practice.

## Cramlington Learning Village Trans-disciplinary Units

Cramlington Learning Village, in Northumberland, has created trans-disciplinary units in which students pursue extended, multidisciplinary projects based on a ‘big question’, and run them with a cohort of 350 year 8 students. Year 8 students spend four 75-minute periods every fortnight on their TDU. In year 9, students take a course entitled ‘Project Humanities’, designed to build on the skills and attributes developed in year 8. Year 9s have five 75-minute periods every fortnight, plus ‘Project Wednesdays’ every Wednesday afternoon from 2.15pm – which they can choose to spend at the in-school ‘project centre’ or outside of school, either making use of community facilities like the library, or at home using their own resources.

## Deansfield Community School A Pedagogy of Entitlement

At Deansfield Community School in Wolverhampton, students participate in projects that draw on the expertise, resource and real-work related skills of cultural partners, shaped by a new ‘pedagogy of entitlement’. Partners include the Lighthouse Media Centre; Wolverhampton Art Gallery, The Arena Theatre and Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club.

## Harlington Area Trust Cross-trust Projects

Harlington Area Trust, in Central Bedfordshire, has created a project-based programme of study for students from years 3, 7 and 9 across five schools. Students develop a series of web-supported projects designed by Project Development Teams composed of students, teachers, learning support staff, parents, governors, and people from local businesses.

## Harris Federation The Harris Student Commission on Learning

The Harris Federation of South London Schools, in South East London, is supporting seventy students – the Harris Learning Commissioners – to become leaders of learning. The Learning Commissioners have investigated the most powerful current teaching and learning practices by interviewing teachers and internationally renowned experts, surveying their peers, visiting sites of excellent practice, and trialling new practices in collaborative enquiry projects with staff, before making recommendations for change. The Federation CEO has committed to implementing all of the Commission’s recommendations.

## Haybridge High School and Sixth Form Unlocking Learning

In the ‘Unlocking Learning’ programme at Haybridge High School and Sixth Form, in Worcestershire, students in Key Stage 3 spend two days a week working on collaborative projects;these include collaborative planning, off-site learning, adult and parent/carer involvement, and working with visitors from the wider community.

## Linton Village College Language Futures

‘Language Futures’ at Linton Village College, in Cambridgeshire, is an innovative project offering a flexible, relevant, and imaginative approach to language learning. A pilot group of seventeen year 8 mixed ability pupils have been offered the chance to study the language of their choice using the latest software, digital media, technology, and contacts abroad. This creative, engaging, and interactive approach personalises the curriculum, allowing the pupils to select a language relevant to them now, whilst also providing them with life-long vocational learning skills enabling them to learn any language in the future.

## Matthew Moss High School My World

At Matthew Moss High School, in Rochdale, students in years 7 and 8 take part in the ‘My World’ curriculum, where they are supported in designing and carrying out their own extended projects. Matthew Moss is also developing ways of measuring learners’ personal, learning, and thinking skills using teacher-, peer-, and self-assessment, as well as on-line questionnaires and portfolio-building.



**Monkseaton High School**  
Spaced Learning

‘Spaced Learning’ is a radical new way of teaching based on neuroscientific discoveries, which allows students to acquire (and retain) a remarkable degree of content within a single lesson. Monkseaton High School, in Northumberland, has found that Spaced Learning is a powerful tool for enquiry-based learning, both as a way of providing ‘baseline’ knowledge before beginning a project, and as a means of ensuring that students finish a course with wide content knowledge as well as the ‘deep-dive’ knowledge acquired through a project.

**Noadswood School**  
Coaching for Learning

Noadswood School, in Southampton, is focused on increasing both the range and depth of learning relationships, developing ‘coaching for learning’ programmes for teachers, parents, and students in partnership with Waitrose.

**Samuel Whitbread Community College**  
A Family of Learning

Samuel Whitbread Community College, in Bedfordshire, has developed a community-based ‘family of learning’ model in partnership with other schools within the same multi-school trust. This includes a project in which disengaged year 11 pupils work with year 5 students on English once a week and evening classes in Spanish attended by whole families.

**The Thomas Hardy School**  
Motivational Interviewing and  
Gap-year Learning Mentors

The Thomas Hardy School, in Dorchester, has developed motivational interviewing, which helps students to explore and resolve ambivalence around their motivation to learn; and a programme for former students to work as ‘learning mentors’, providing support and challenge to current students.

**Villiers High School**  
Futures Curribulum

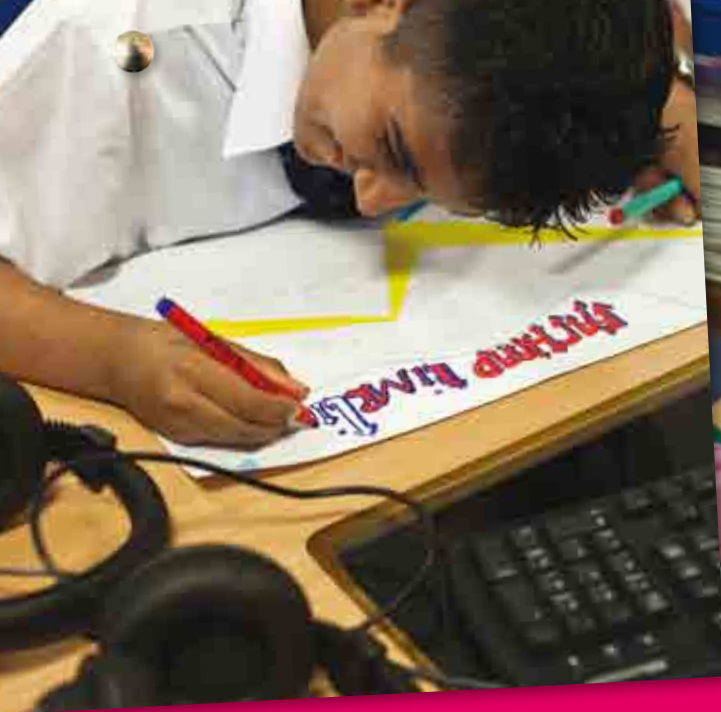
At Villiers High School, in Ealing, West London, all Year 8 students spend one day per fortnight on the ‘Futures Curriculum’; half term-length modules are co-designed by students and staff, students then choose from a menu of options. In addition, on each ‘Futures Curriculum’ day students choose from a selection of one-hour sessions based on identified student needs – such as ‘public speaking’, ‘anger management’, and support with English.

**Yewlands School Technology College**  
0–19+ Learning Offer

Yewlands School Technology College, in Sheffield, have been designing a seamless ‘0–19+ Learning Offer’, including extended enquiry-led projects during Years 7, 8 and 9, and projects aimed at smoothing the primary-to-secondary transition across a multi-school trust.

*In the new public education system the school must be a place for everyone, a meeting place in the physical and also the social, cultural and political sense of the word. A forum or site for meeting and relating, where children and adults meet and commit to something, where they can dialogue, listen, and discuss in order to share meanings: it is a place of infinite cultural, linguistic, social, aesthetic, ethical, political and economic possibilities. A place of ethical and political praxis, a space for democratic learning. A place for research and creativity, coexistence and pleasure, critical thought and emancipation.*

ASSOCIACIÓ DE MESTRES ROSA SENSEA



This pamphlet is the third publication from the Learning Futures programme. The programme's aim is to innovate in pedagogy so that more young people engage actively and positively with their learning through school (and achieve better learning outcomes as a result) and also retain a commitment to learning beyond their school years.

Here we examine what schools need to do in order to increase the authentic engagement of their students, and present findings that argue that schools themselves need

to become more engaged – as learning communities, in learning outside school, in partnership with local communities and parents – if they are to see deeper engagement in their students.

Drawing on two years of work with over forty schools, this pamphlet presents a new approach to designing learning for engagement – both of learners and of schools. *Learning Futures* schools provide a platform for the emergence of schools adapted for learning in the 21st century.



LEARNING  
FUTURES

